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LIFE AND GENIUS OF RAPHAEL.

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THE pontificate of Leo X. has justly been regarded as the most illustrious period of the Arts which the world has seen, since that immortal era of Athens when she flourished beneath the genial sovereignty of Pericles. After a long night of ages, during which, not only the Fine Arts but every branch of literature was buried in oblivion, or had been confined to the jealous hands of monks, the creative genius of Italy awoke from her lethargy, and, about the period we have named, produced the most beautiful and abundant trophies of her plastic powers. With the vigor and elastic richness of youth, the gifted sons of Italy then put forth their new-born energies; and the cultivated world has ever since delighted to admire the triumphs of their genius, to cherish and honor the products of their toil.

Among the distinguished artists who adorn that period, may be named Angelo, Titian, Bramante, and the illustrious man whose life and genius we are now briefly to review. Raphael stands at the head

of that immortal galaxy, or at least he divides the supremacy with Angelo; for, though Angelo is regarded as the greatest of sculptors, and architects, by the united voice of mankind Raphael is conceded to have been the first of painters.

He was born at Urbino, in Italy, in 1483. His ancestors for several generations had been artists, though they had never been distinguished as such. He was, therefore, surrounded by early associations which directed his attention to the Arts, and was favored with those advantages which were of the highest importance in aiding the wonderful faculties which nature had so profusely bestowed upon him.

It was at the youthful age of twenty-five, that Raphael deserted Florence, and repaired to Rome, the scene of his greatest achievements. Julius II. then sat upon the Papal throne, and was engaged in ornamenting and painting the public halls of the Vatican. Many artists had already been employed on these works. Bramante, who was a distant relative of Raphael, and was first architect of St. Peter's church, proposed him to the Pope as a rising artist, who should be added to the number of distinguished men who were already employed in the works going forward, under the auspices of that pontiff. To Raphael, Julius immediately assigned one of the halls of the Vatican, and commissioned him to paint four subjects: the School of Athens, Parnassus,

the Genius of Jurisprudence, and the Dispute of the Sacrament.

These are allegorical paintings, intended to represent by symbols the great ideas which they most readily suggest to the mind by their titles. The Dispute of the Sacrament represents various Doctors and Fathers of the Church assembled in Council, to decide and establish the true doctrine respecting the nature of the Sacrament of the Supper, in order to silence all disputes afterward respecting it. The School of Athens represents an assemblage of the greatest philosophers of Greece—Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, Epicurus, and the rest; and the skill of the artist is exhibited in the ideal sketch which is given of the appearances of the several sages whom he has so powerfully represented. The Parnassus is a representation of the ancient home of the Muses, where the minstrels of Greece are assembled amid laurel groves; and the ideal scenes connected with classical mythology, are most admirably reproduced. The painting of Jurisprudence represents that science by the history and execution of Justice. In it, Justinian publishes his Digest of Roman Law; and Gregory IX. gives out the false through famous decretals, which for a time formed so strong a bulwark to the Papal power. The figures of Moderation and of Force are appropriate accompaniments of the picture, and are admirably drawn. Taken as a whole, the four paintings of this hall so

much pleased Julius II. that he gave orders that the productions of other artists in the halls of the Vatican should be effaced, and the whole be appropriated to the superior labors of Raphael. Nine years elapsed before he completed all the works which he executed in these splendid apartments. A part of them were finished during the pontificate of Julius II. The rest followed after Leo X. had been elevated to the Papal throne.

In one of his other paintings belonging to this period, Raphael subserves the interests of Romish orthodoxy as well as those of Art. Controversies had already begun in the Church respecting the Sacrament of the Supper, which denied that the consecrated host was the body and blood of Christ; thus opposing the practice of communion in one kind. The piece is called the Miracle of Bolsena. High mass is being said; Pope Julius II. is present, severely eyeing the priest who officiates at the altar; around are arrayed the cardinals and prelates, who witness with indifference the miracle, an indifference which shows their full faith in the real presence; while the unbelieving priest at the altar is astonished and terrified at the sight of undoubted blood, which issues from the consecrated wafer, and stains with its crimson hue the white cloth of the communion table. This indeed should settle the controversy! But the Catholic painter here unfortunately contradicts Catholic theology; for the latter affirms that there can be no real consecration, and hence no real body and blood, unless the *faith* of the officiating priest be strong and firm. Unbelief like that of the priest in the picture, entirely vitiates the validity of the Sacrament. But in this dilemma the artist doubtless did his best to combat heresy, though not to cultivate dialectics. At length the turbulent Julius died, more conversant with the warrior's sword than the shepherd's staff; more charmed by the loud tumult of battle than by the gentler accents of prayer. With a new pontificate, a new and more splendid career opened before Raphael.

Immediately upon his accession, Leo X. gave ample evidence of his partiality for this artist, and of his resolution to continue him in the possession of the high honor and favor which he had enjoyed with his predecessor. To testify his gratitude, as well as to afford pleasure to Leo, Raphael set about the execution of several paintings which, while they afford-

ed ample opportunity to develop the artist's talents, and increase his fame, complimented, in the most distinguished manner, the new pontiff.

The first of these was a representation of St. Peter delivered from prison. It was only one year before his election to the Papal throne, that Leo himself had been imprisoned after the battle of Ravenna, under the pontificate of Julius II. St. Peter is represented first as asleep, while a radiant angel stands beside him, about to break his chains. He is then represented as leaving the prison, preceded by the apostle, whose brilliant form illuminates the darkness; while, in another view, the distant watchman of the prison is aroused, and is alarming the sentinels. This divine deliverance was intended to suggest the escape of Leo, which was itself ascribed by the more superstitious of his contemporaries, to a miraculous interposition.

The other painting was that of the deliverance of Italy from the invasion of Attila, by St. Leo. The countless hordes of the Goths are descending the mountain passes, which open upon the fertile plains of Italy. St. Leo appears at the head of a train of unarmed followers, himself bearing the cross. The invading warrior, mounted upon a formidable steed, is astonished and appalled, not so much by the appearance of the suppliant yet reproachful pontiff, as by the menacing apparition of Peter and Paul in mid-air above the train. He is overcome with terror, and is about to retreat; and his multitudes of barbarians are turning back into the mountain gorges, leaving the pontiff and Italy free from the terrors of their invasion. Leo X. is painted as the person of St. Leo; who is thus symbolically represented as the champion, the hero, and the deliverer of the church.

But as there is a tide in human affairs, from which they ebb and flow, so also is there a climax in painting; a point toward which all previous achievements converge, to which they are inferior, and from which they afterward descend in eminence and become less perfect. There is a golden era in the arts, as well as an iron or a brazen one; and the honor belongs to the last and greatest picture of Raphael, of exhibiting that acme of excellence in the art of painting, which none of his predecessors had been able to reach, and to which every subsequent achievement has been inferior.

The Transfiguration of Christ, by Raphael, to which we now allude, holds the same place in painting which the Dome of St. Peter's, by Angelo, does in architecture; or the figures of the mausoleum of Julius II., by the same artist, hold in sculpture. These are all the greatest in their respective arts, which the genius of modern times has produced. They occupy the same place which, in the ancient world, the Parthenon held in architecture; which the statue of the Olympian Jove, by Phidias, maintained in sculpture, and which the Venus of Apelles, held in painting. It is scarcely possible that human skill could be able to execute anything more perfect or more glorious than this last work of Raphael, which marks the period of the perfection of his genius, when he had exercised and trained his great abilities in every department of his art; when he was in the maturity of his powers; when a sublime subject was presented to his pencil; and when a new and formidable rivalry had arisen between himself and several other painters of the period, who conspired to excel this his greatest effort, and produce between them a picture which should tear from his own work its diadem of supremacy.

It is a fortunate circumstance, both for the interest of art as well as for the fullness of Raphael's fame, that he should have lived to execute this work, and it may perhaps also be fortunate for both, that he lived no longer. For it has not seldom occurred, that genius, which is both so precocious and so prolific as was Raphael's, after having achieved its best works at an early age, gradually degenerates, loses its tone from the previously too great tension which existed, and falls at last far below its former attainments. More than one such instance has occurred in the history, not only of other departments of human labor, but even in the very art in which Raphael excelled. To name no other example, the case and history of Lionello Spada, of the School of Bologna, will readily occur to the recollection of those conversant with the history of Italian art.

In Raphael's great painting of the Transfiguration, the summit of the mount appears in bold outline, and the Saviour of men is elevated above it, suspended and quietly wafted, as it were, in mid-air. Elias and Moses appear near him, enrobed in a splendor which is re-

flected from the greater unearthly glory of Christ. From this divine personage, invested with that appalling brilliancy which constituted the Transfiguration itself, proceeds the illumination which lights up the whole scene. The person of Christ beggars description; not so much from the intensified splendor in which it is shrouded, as by the perfect expression of that divinity and *superhuman character* which so distinctly marks it, and which is, indeed, the great merit of the picture. The venerable forms of the Old Testament saints, impress the observer with awe, as they engage in communion with one whom they evidently conceive to be greater than themselves. The three disciples occupy a lower portion of the picture. One turns away his head, overpowered by the light; another has thrown himself upon the earth in terror and awe; while a third covers his face with his hands, to shield it from the insupportable splendor. At the base of the mountain appear the other disciples, whom Christ had left there, attempting to perform a miracle by casting out a deaf and dumb spirit. The whole picture is a pyramid, throwing up the person of Christ above its apex, into bold outline; admirably indicative, on the one hand, of his earthly connection, and on the other, of his heavenly origin. The style of this painting, more than most of Raphael's productions, is grand and sublime. The midnight mountain scene, with every attendant circumstance of mystery and solitude which adheres to it; the apparition of those departed saints, hoary with venerable antiquity, and illustrious with revered sanctity and renown; the overwhelming emotions of the apostles; the distant yet approaching thunder-cloud—and above all, the divine head and countenance of Christ, reveling in an ecstasy which seems even to satiate the Godhead within him, and which appears fitly to represent the visible and ecstatic countenance of the King of kings; all these circumstances render this work probably the grandest and noblest achievement of the pencil. Upon this picture Raphael bestowed great care. He labored upon it with unabating interest; and threw into it all his resources and all his skill. It was, indeed, a theme very favorably adapted to exhibit his excellences. But the picture possesses, in a high degree, one merit which was more generally displayed by Angelo; we mean a powerful representation of the sublime and the grand,

combined, at the same time, with that exquisite grace and sweetness in which Raphael had no rival, even among the most illustrious artists of ancient or modern times.

The *personal incidents* of his life are fewer than those which have been preserved respecting any other great artist. This arose from the fact that his career was short, that he was cut off when he had just completed his thirty-seventh year, that his time was, for the most part, occupied in the quiet prosecution of his profession, and that he took no part in the ecclesiastical or political events of his era. For several years before his death, he had formed and cherished the expectation that Leo X. would confer upon him the dignity of cardinal. This hope resulted from the fact that he had advanced large sums of money to Leo, which he could repay in this inexpensive manner. He was also a great favorite with the pontiff, who took great pleasure in granting every request which could reasonably be made of him. Nor were the characters of a painter and cardinal so incompatible in that age, as it might seem to be in this. Many cardinals were not even priests. They took no share in any religious exercises. They were mere princes of the church, who added to the splendor of their hereditary wealth, that dignity which, in the Roman court, belonged to the rank of a cardinal. Beside this, nearly all Raphael's best paintings were on religious and scriptural themes: they adorned the ecclesiastical edifices of Rome; and thus even his art may be said to have outwardly bound him to the service and glory of the church.

It was this hope which induced Raphael to decline several splendid offers of marriage which were made to him. The Cardinal Bibiena, his friend, offered him his accomplished niece, Maria Bibiena; but Raphael postponed accepting the offer, till at length the lady died, deeply mortified, it has been said, by his delay. Whether Leo would have conferred the hat of a cardinal upon him, it is impossible to determine. Raphael's wealth, the splendor of his mode of life, and his celebrity as an artist, would have recommended him; but there were other circumstances which might have effectually hindered the consummation of his wishes, which even the voluptuous Leo might have respected. Unfortunately the private character of Raphael was blemished by a fault, too

common, indeed, to men of genius, and to that age and country; but which the celebrity of his name and the romance of his attachment had rendered too widely notorious to be overlooked. His favorite was the most beautiful female in Rome. She was the daughter of a baker, but, under Raphael's fostering care, she became one of the most accomplished women of her time. So violent was the attachment of the painter for her, that when he had been engaged to execute some paintings for his patron Agostino Chigi, he constantly neglected his work, until that nobleman had his mistress removed to his own palace, so that Raphael might enjoy her society without interruption; after which the work rapidly progressed to its completion. Several portraits of her remain, executed by Raphael and his pupils, which amply justify the praises bestowed upon her charms by her contemporaries and by her lover. It was the society of this female which he preferred to the chains of a lawful and honorable connection; but, at the same time, it was the untoward circumstance which seems to have impeded his promotion to the cardinalship, or at least, to have caused the postponement of his elevation.*

It was, however, in the midst of these hopes and uncertainties, and of his splendid undertakings and achievements; when surrounded by the admiration of the world, when favored by the society of the most distinguished men of Rome, when in the very height of his youthful career, with the enjoyment of a long and illustrious life spreading out in brilliant anticipation before him—that death suddenly summoned him away. The cause of this calamitous event has scarcely ever been disputed. Raphael's constitution was sensitive and delicate. As is often the case with genius, his physical frame was weak. But instead of being warned by this circumstance to moderate those indulgences which his depraved morality did not constrain him entirely to relinquish, he was often guilty of great excesses. The impetuosity of his passions was not proportioned to his physical strength; and it was after such a season of unusual and imprudent excess, that he was attack-

* In speaking of Raphael's pictures of the Madonna, *Fuseli* says: "Raphael was less penetrated by a devout than by an amorous principle. His design was less to stamp maternal affection with the seal of religion, than to consecrate the face he adored. His Holy Families, with one exception, are the apotheosis of his Fornarina."

ed with a violent fever. He concealed the true cause of his disease from his physician, who, attributing it to a source other than the real one, resorted to bleeding, for the purpose of depletion. Raphael at once sank under the double exhaustion. He prepared himself to die; received the last sacraments of the church; provided liberally for the support of the partner of his pleasures, as well as for other charitable objects, and expired calmly at the early age of thirty-seven. His body was laid out in state, in the same hall which contained the great painting of the Transfiguration, which had just been completed. It was a fit association to place in such close and instructive connection, so strong a proof of the mortality and of the immortality of man; of the transient nature of his body, and of the undying glory which attends the products of his intellectual part. The lesson in this instance must have been unusually forcible; for Raphael's earthly existence was as short and frail as his intellectual being is glorious and imperishable. We may well imagine the mingled emotions of awe and regret which that creation of art would produce on the mind of every beholder. No more striking scene has, perhaps, occurred within the memory of man, than that splendid trophy suspended beside the inanimate remains of its immortal creator. It suggests to the mind the sublime truth, that man has kindredship alike with earth and with heaven; that he is composed of two most opposite and incongruous elements—the crumbling dust, and the God-like and deathless spirit which animates it.

Raphael's funeral train was composed of the most eminent citizens of Rome, headed by Leo X., together with an immense multitude of his friends and admirers. That voluptuous Pope, unused to meditate upon scenes of death and gloom, was compelled, in this instance, to draw near and shed tears of sincere regret over the remains of his favorite; and the seven-hilled city herself gave signs of universal sorrow, which were seldom exhibited even for the greatest of her expiring pontiffs. He was buried beneath his own shrine in the Pantheon, a temple once devoted to the worship of all the gods; and there he was deposited, amid the mausoleums of other immortal heroes, of whom he himself would not be the least. Cardinal Beibo, the most distinguished writer of the Papal court, was commissioned

by Leo to inscribe a classic epitaph upon his tomb. And over that tomb, for many long years, the artist and the prelate, the pontiff and the poet, the illustrious and the beautiful, bent alike in ardent admiration and fond regret. But around him, in the splendid hall and temples of the Eternal City, shone forth upon applauding generations the enduring monuments of his genius and his fame; while, at the same time, they proclaim, with equal eloquence and power, another lesson: that the violence of ungoverned passion will extinguish the brightest light of genius, and dig an early grave for its gifted but reckless possessor.

LAOCOON, OR THE LIMITS OF PAINTING AND POETRY.

Translated from the German of Lessing.

THE plastic arts especially, besides the inevitable influence which they exert on the character of a nation, are capable of an effect which demands the close inspection of the law. If beautiful men produced beautiful statues, these again reacted upon those; and the state was indebted to beautiful statues, among other causes, for its beautiful men. With us, the sensitiveness of maternal imagination appears to express itself only in monsters.

From this point of view, I think I see a truth in certain ancient traditions which have been rejected, without qualification, as lies. The mothers of Aristomenes, of Aristodemus, of Alexander the Great, of Scipio, of Augustus, of Galerius—all dreamed, during their pregnancy, of serpents. The serpent was a symbol of godhead, and the beautiful statues and paintings of Bacchus, of Apollo, of Mercury, of Hercules, were seldom without a serpent. The honest women had feasted their eyes on the god, during the day; and the confounding dream awakened the image of the beast. Thus I rescue the dream, and surrender the explanation which the pride of their sons, and the impudence of flatterers, have made of it. There must have been some reason why the adulterous fancy was always a serpent.

But I wander out of my way. I only

wished to establish this point, that with the ancients beauty was the highest law of the plastic arts.

And, this point established, it follows necessarily, that everything else, to which the plastic arts might likewise extend, must yield, altogether, where it was found incompatible with beauty; and where it was found compatible with beauty, must, at least, be subordinate to that.

I will go no farther than the expression. There are passions and degrees of passion which manifest themselves in the countenance by the ugliest distortions, and throw the whole body into such violent attitudes, that all the beautiful lines which define it in a state of rest are lost. Accordingly, the ancient artists either abstained altogether from the representations of these passions; or they reduced them to a lower degree—one in which they are susceptible of some measure of beauty.

Rage and despair disfigured none of their works. I venture to affirm they have never represented a Fury.

They reduced anger to earnestness. With the poet, it was the angry Jupiter who hurled the lightning; with the artist, it was only the earnest.

Lamentation was softened into concern. And where this could not be done—where lamentation would have been as belittling as it was disfiguring—what did Timanthes in that case? His picture of the sacrifice of Iphigenia—wherein he apportions to each of the spectators the degree of sorrow proper to each, but covers the face of the father, which should have exhibited the most intense of all—is well known, and many handsome things have been said concerning it. One says: "the painter had so exhausted himself in sad countenances, that he despaired of his ability to give the father a sadder one." "He confessed by this," says another, "that the grief of a father, in such a case, is beyond all expression." For my part, I see here neither the incompetence of the artist, nor the incompetence of the art. With the increase of the passion, the traits of countenance corresponding to that passion are proportionally marked. The highest degree of it has the most decided expression; and nothing in art is easier than to represent what is decided. But Timanthes knew the limits which the Graces have assigned to his art. He knew that the degree of lamentation which became Agamemnon, as father,